

## Migrant labourers in the marine fisheries sector

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It is now recognised that migration is an integral part of the survival strategies of the poor; especially where local economics offer limited livelihood alternatives. Intervention strategies should, therefore, be directed at reducing the vulnerability of migrants, not at reducing migration itself. Migration has become a key facet of today's world. Migrants living outside their country of birth are 191 million.

Migratory behaviour is of two types, outward migration and inward migration. Outward migration is defined as the movement of labourers outside their revenue villages to seek employment opportunities available elsewhere and inward migration is the movement of labourers into the native villages from any other place in search of any feasible work according to their capacity/potential. However, the migration of labourers from the agricultural sector to the fisheries sector is a grave economic problem affecting both the agrarian and fisheries economy. On one hand it causes labour displacement in the agrarian sector and on the other it leads to labour gain in the fisheries sector. A phenomena of distress migration was observed in Bundur Harbour, Dakshina Kannada District wherein a population of 500 contract labourers including men and women migrated from Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu into Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka state to work as loading/unloading labourers at the Bundur Harbour. The term distress migration and migration for survival have often been used; explaining migration by the poor from their native villages in response to natural calamities and other shocks.

A sample of 35 migrant labourers was selected for the study. The responses were collected from the labourers using a well structured interview

schedule. The data was tabulated and the results analysed. The findings revealed that, the labourers migrated from Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu. Villupuram is one of the poorest districts of Tamil Nadu ravaged by vast spells of drought causing losses to the agrarian economy of the district. Eighty six percent of the population depend on agriculture for a living. Owing to lack of perennial irrigation sources and deficit rainfall, drought conditions have become a regular phenomenon in these districts forcing a vast majority of its rural population to migrate to neighbouring states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in search of employment opportunities.

The findings revealed that more than half the total number of respondents (54.28%) were young *i.e.*, less than 35 years of age, followed by 34.29% who were middle aged *i.e.*, between 36 and 45 years of age. Only 11.43% belonged to the old age group *i.e.*, above 45 years of age (Fig. 1). With respect to the educational status, it was observed that majority (82.85%) were illiterate, followed by those having primary level of education *i.e.*, 11.43% and only 5.71% had undergone high school education (Fig. 2).

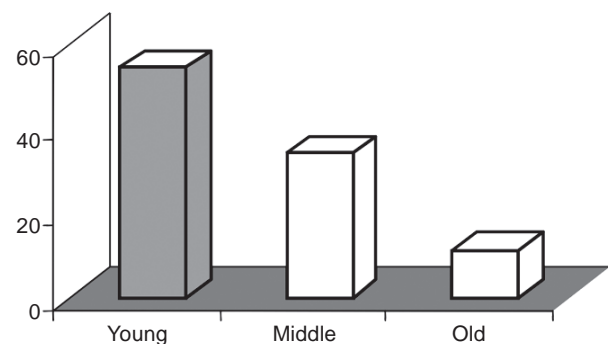


Fig. 1. Age distribution of respondents

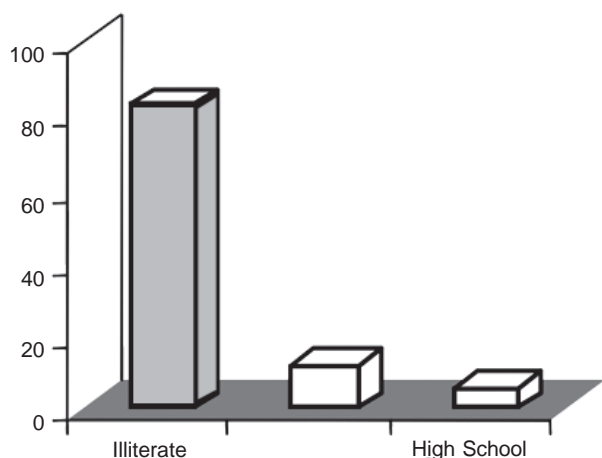


Fig. 2. Educational status of respondents

The peak period of employment for these migrant labourers was during October-December with an average of 25 days of employment in a month. The average wage of male labourers during the peak season was Rs. 300/- day for 14 h of work from 5 am to 7 pm and for female labourers Rs. 100-200/day for 13 h of work from 5 am to 6 pm. It could be observed that male labourers undertook heavy work such as unloading fish from boats, breaking ice and putting them in fish baskets as well as loading them into fish trucks. The women labourers carried the unloaded fish from the harbour into fish trucks. The medium season of employment was during August, September, October and November and the average wage during this season was Rs. 100-150 for male labourers and for females it was Rs. 50-60. The average work hours during this season for both male and female labourers were 13 h from 5 am to 6 pm. The lean period of employment was during June –July when the migrant labourers returned home to Villupuram in Tamilnadu. During the lean period, these labourers were employed as agricultural labourers with an average wage rate of Rs.100 /day for men and Rs 40/day for women. The women undertook works such as weeding, fertiliser application and irrigating crops manually, whereas men were involved in all operations from land preparation till harvest. The women worked from 7.30 am to 12 noon and men worked in the fields from 7.30 am to 2.30 pm.

Majority of the migrant labourers (71.43%) had joint families and 28.57% had nuclear families

(Fig. 3). Most of the labourers migrated to Dakshina Kannada District 2-3 decades back with their families. Another interesting observation was family labour was also utilised, to accentuate their income. The social participation *i.e.*, membership in co-operative societies, self-help groups and local bodies were nil. All the migrant families possessed Ration Cards and availed benefits of welfare programmes of the government in their native town. As far as the occupational experience of the respondents were considered, most of them had an average of 10 years of experience in their jobs with 34.28% of respondents with low and high level of experience and 31.44% with medium level of experience.

Though the migrant labourers contribute significantly to the marine fisheries development, their problems are numerous often not effectively addressed by the government and policy makers. They do not have ration cards or identity cards at the place of work, suffer from long working hours, lack hygienic working conditions, proper shelter and housing facilities, insurance facilities in instances of physical injuries endured during work, inadequate wage structure and are not eligible for benefits of welfare programmes of the State Fisheries Department.

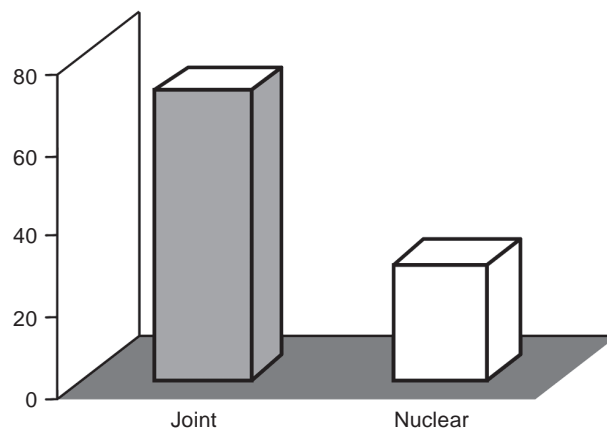


Fig. 3. Family type of respondents

Social safety measures such as targeted poverty alleviation programmes for migrants, issue of temporary identity cards at place of work, provision of insurance policies and ensuring remunerative wage policy for migrant labourers will give an integrated, multidimensional and holistic approach to enhance their livelihoods and mitigate the negative effects of distress migration.